

Maine County Corners Country's Best Pacers

By HENRY A. FARNHAM.

THERE need be no exclamations of astonishment if the free-for-all classes on the Grand Circuit are filled with second and third raters next season. There are strong indications at present that either Single G. or Margaret Dillon—and perhaps both of them—will be shipped in box cars to Aroostook county, Me., some time during the coming winter to join the rest of the Grand Circuit elite which have already been annexed by the most isolated community of Yankees in New England.

Over 100 miles of Maine forest separate Aroostook from the rest of the United States, but three of the fastest pacers the world has ever known—John R. Braden, 2:02 $\frac{1}{4}$; Roy Grattan, 2:01 $\frac{1}{4}$, and Jackson Grattan, also with a mark of 2:01 $\frac{1}{4}$ —are permanent residents. There are but four good sized towns in the county, all of them under 5,000 in population. But what they lack in numbers they make up for in sporting blood and Aroostook has gone wild over "hoss racin'." The county ordinarily raises about \$35,000,000 worth of potatoes a year and the prosperity of its residents permits of extravagance in motor cars and horseflesh.

For years every Aroostook village has had its trotters. There are several half mile tracks in the county and during the short, hot summers rivalry between the different towns has been intense. Presque Isle is one of the most progressive of these little communities and when the Presque Isle trotters were left behind by nags from Houlton and Caribou and Fort Fairfield local pride was deeply wounded.

During the winter of 1921 Presque Isle decided that something must be done to preserve its self-respect, and after innumerable conferences on the post office steps, at grange meetings and around the big open fire in the hotel office, the Mooselouk Club was organized. Prosperous potato growers, clerks, professional men, barbers—everybody—joined; and, what is more, everybody turned anywhere from ten to several hundred dollars into the club treasury. An ambassador was sent "outside" to look the ground over and he returned with John R. Braden, the fourteen-year-old pride of the Grand Circuit, which he acquired for \$4,500 of Presque Isle money.

"Now," said Presque Isle, "we'll show 'em! Darn 'em!"

And Presque Isle did. During the entire season not one of the other towns came within miles of winning a race and members of the Mooselouk Club and other residents made more money in the race track pools than they had spent in the purchase of John R. Gentry's most famous son.

Early last spring the influx of rival racers began. The sporting blood of the rest of the county was thoroughly aroused and Calgary Earl, a sleek chestnut gelding with a formidable record, was the first importation. Houlton expected great things of the Earl, who had done well in Syracuse, Springfield and on other Grand Circuit tracks. Their hopes might have been realized had his overanxious owners refrained from pushing him to the limit in a workout when he was in no condition to be extended. The Earl hadn't gone a mile in under 2:23 in months when they sent him around the half mile track at Houlton in 2:05, "just to see what he could do." As a result his speed was broken forever, so the horsemen say, and Presque Isle's pride remained unshaken.

In the meantime Caribou entered the lists. The Caribou Driving Club was organized along the lines of the Presque Isle horse owning syndicate and \$8,500 was raised. The money went for Roy Grattan, a bay gelding sired by Grattan Royal, with a record lower than that of the Braden horse.

Houlton—undiscouraged by the fiasco with Calgary Earl—answered the challenge by forming a driving club of her own, raising \$12,500 and investing it in Jackson Grattan, a rangey bay stallion sired by Solon Grattan, with a mark as low as that of Roy. In August the racing began in earnest with John N. Willard, a seventy-two-year-old veteran, on the sulky behind John R. Braden. He was from twenty to thirty years older than his rival Jehus and his horse was ten years older than the two speedy Grattans.

For a time the issue was in doubt. Willard won the first heat of the first race at Caribou on August 25, but the other two went to Roy Grattan, the Caribou horse. In Houlton, a week later, Willard captured three straight heats, although less than a neck separated the Braden horse from his antagonists. Early in September Roy Grattan won at Presque Isle and again at Woodstock, N. B., although by a narrow margin.

The madness which enveloped Aroostook spread to the rest of Maine and the three racers were brought down to Bangor, where over 10,000 enthusiasts from every hamlet in the State gathered at Bass Park to watch what was to be the deciding contest.

Book making and pool selling is illegal under the Maine law, but the night before the race several hundred Aroostook townsmen jammed themselves into the cellar of one of the hotels and bought pools frantically. Roy Grattan was the favorite at odds of ten to eight. Presque Isle and Houlton both were confident and, figuratively, all three towns bet their shirts.

The track was perfect and Roy Grattan drew the pole. A groan went up from the Presque Isle and Houlton contingents in the grand stand, for it was felt that the three horses were so evenly matched that even so slight an advantage as that would decide the race. There was almost no scoring. Around the track they went like three perfect and well oiled pacing machines, their manes streaming in the wind and their drivers crouching low on the wire wheeled sulkies.

Braden took the lead as they passed up the backstretch on the first lap. Jackson Grattan's nose drew up until it was even with Braden's withers, and there it stuck. Roy Grattan was nearly abreast of the Houlton horse and could not be shaken off. They thundered down the homestretch and under the wire without the change of a fraction of an inch in their relative positions. The second and third heats were repetitions of the first, save that Roy instead of Jackson Grattan won second place in the third. Presque Isle had cleaned up again.

Later there were races on the State Fair grounds at Lewiston and on the track at Waterville, but John R. Braden's supremacy remained unshaken and the bank accounts of his owners grew overnight beyond their most sanguine expectations.

Aroostook's chief income comes from potatoes, and it is going to be a bad year. But Houlton and Caribou already are talking of Margaret Dillon and Fort Fairfield—the only Aroostook town of any consequence at present without a Grand Circuit racer—is casting eyes toward Single G. Once they make up their minds it is likely that the price will not matter overmuch. But one question is causing serious concern: Can either Margaret Dillon or Single G.—the two flyers still left in the Grand Circuit free-for-all—show their heels to the Presque Isle racer? That's what the rest of Aroostook wants to know, and darn the expense!

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